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CANDIDATES FOR MOSCOW

Leading candidates to succeed Llewellyn Thompson as the U.S. ambassador to Moscow are three veteran career diplomats now serving in other ambassadorial posts: Jacob Beam in Prague, Walworth Barbour in Tel Aviv and Richard Davis in Bucharest.

WASHINGTON: AN OBSERVER CALLS

Party veteran Yuri Zhukov, Pravda's chief commentator with close connections to the Russian leadership, has arrived in Washington with a double mission. He wants to get to know the men around Mr. Nixon and wants to tell them it's time to play down the Soviet-Czech crisis and get U.S.-Soviet relations back on a normal footing. Zhukov sometimes signs his column "Observer."

CABINET: MAKE NO SMALL PLANS

Richard Nixon's Cabinet members have specific assignments in the crisis of the cities. Secretary of Labor George Shultz is to work on employment of black teen-agers; Commerce's Maurice Stans has been told to recruit businessmen in voluntary programs to set poor people up in business for themselves; Agriculture's Clifford Hardin will try to crack hard-core rural poverty. Former automaker George Romney of Housing and Urban Development has ideas about automating the construction industry in order to bring housing costs down. Former contractor John Volpe plans to replace the current Federal highway program with a 30-year plan for an integrated national transportation network including trains and urban rapid transit as well as highways.

CABINET VISITS WITH IKE

Former President Eisenhower, from the Walter Reed hospital bed where he is recovering from his heart attacks of last year, has invited all of the Nixon Cabinet appointees individually to stop in and see him. Some already have. The former President is said to have had prior doubts about only one man, Defense Secretary Melvin Laird, but pronounced himself impressed after talking with him.

U.S. SORTIES: HIGHER AND HIGHER

U.S. bombers from Thailand and South Vietnam made 13,000 sorties in November over supply routes in Laos and 15,000 last month, the highest rate since the intensive bombing runs over North Vietnam in 1965. The bombers no longer use armed-reconnaissance tactics but instead concentrate on dropping huge tonnages of explosives on "chokepoints" at mountain passes and constricted roadnets.

MCCARTHY: TARGET AHEAD

Why did Sen. Eugene McCarthy give up his seat on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee for one on the Government Operations Committee? In the opinion of some officials, it is because Government Operations keeps watch on "the military-industrial complex." McCarthy has charged that the Pentagon has gone beyond "the effective control of Congress" to become "the strongest independent power in world affairs."